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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [EWWT](#) [SENV](#) [NATO](#) [EU](#) [UP](#) [RO](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE'S "OTHER" SECURITY THREAT - ROMANIA

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[1](#)B. 09 USNATO 475

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) From the perspective of Kyiv, the Ukrainian-Romanian bilateral relationship is surprisingly troubled, with a wide range of irritants both great and small. The most neuralgic issues for Ukrainians are linked to concerns about Romanian irredentism (e.g., issuance of Romanian passports to Ukrainian citizens). Disputes over the Black Sea continental shelf and over navigation and the environment in the Danube Delta add further venom to the mix. The cumulative weight of these issues has created a largely negative dynamic in the relationship from Ukraine's perspective. One should not exaggerate the dangers, but Ukrainian-Romanian tensions do constitute one bit of unfinished business in the process of normalizing Ukraine's relations with her western neighbors. Much of the problem on the Ukrainian side is psychological and stems from Ukrainians' larger sense of political insecurity, particularly vis-a-vis Russia. Time should ameliorate some of the tensions, and the election of a new Ukrainian president in February might present an opportunity to put the relationship on a better footing. End summary.

BUCHAREST THE THIRD ROME

[1](#)2. (U) "Many know about the idea of Moscow as the 'Third Rome,' often used in discussions about the nature of Russia's great power status. Far fewer people in Ukraine know that on the other side of our country is another state with claims to be an heir of Rome. ...Romania is our strong, determined competitor, single-mindedly working against our interests and taking advantage of our weakness in order to strengthen itself." -- Serhiy Tihipko, Ukrainian presidential candidate.

[1](#)3. (SBU) "Unfortunately, after joining the EU and NATO Romania hasn't stopped pursuing its interest at the expense of Ukraine. Moreover Bucharest is behaving even more aggressively." -- Ukrainian MFA non-paper.

[1](#)4. (C) One of the great successes over the past two decades in promoting a Euro-Atlantic trajectory for Ukraine has been the establishment of generally positive relations between Ukraine and Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. This process has included coming to terms with some heavy historical baggage, the creation of reasonably satisfactory conditions for ethnic minorities on either side of the borders, and the perception in Ukraine that Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are among Ukraine's strongest advocates within NATO and the EU. Bilateral problems no doubt persist, but they are largely off the radar screen and do not define the relationships.

[1](#)5. (C) The situation with Romania and Ukraine is altogether different, with surprising numbers of Ukrainians from different parts of the political spectrum expressing distrust

of Romania's intentions and policies toward Ukraine. On the right, Ukrainian nationalists accuse Romania of harboring ill-concealed designs on Ukrainian territory. From the political center, former Minister of Economics and presidential candidate Serhiy Tihipko tried to make Romania a campaign issue (happily, he got very little traction) by sounding the alarm about Bucharest's purported machinations against Ukraine. When we went to discuss Romania with the MFA, it was telling that the Romania Desk handed us several off-the-shelf, English-language non-papers critical of Romania; the EU Commission office here received at least one of these non-papers in September 2009.

THE BILL OF PARTICULARS

¶6. (C) The laundry list of Ukrainian grievances against Romania spans a range of political and economic issues. The most insidious problem is Ukrainian suspicion of Romanian irredentist sentiment, or even strategy, with regard to Chernivtsi Oblast and the southern portion of Odesa Oblast, areas that were taken from Romania by the Soviet Union in 1940 and again in 1944. Some thoughtful Ukrainian observers have told us that Romanian President Basescu had regrettably pandered to Romanian nationalism during his reelection campaign in 2009, including vis-a-vis Ukraine. Some less-thoughtful observers here are inclined to take the irredentist sloganeering of Romanian fringe groups and extrapolate them into statements of Romanian intention, or even policy.

¶7. (C) In the same vein, Ukraine is irritated by the

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Romanian decision several years ago to begin issuing Romanian passports to Ukrainian citizens in Chernivtsi and Odesa Oblasts who qualify based on their (or their forebears') Romanian citizenship prior to 1940. On the most basic level, the Ukrainians are vexed because Ukraine simply does not recognize dual citizenship. Moreover, as one EU diplomat here observed, Romania's practice creates an unhealthy precedent for Russia to justify issuing its passports in places like the Crimea -- which, as Abkhazia and South Ossetia demonstrated, could be the first step toward creeping annexation. Finally, for those Ukrainians most mistrustful of Romania, the latter's passportization policy raises fears that Romania might be laying the groundwork for a little creeping annexation of its own. The more paranoid interpretation is fed by the fact that no one seems to have any hard data about the number of passports Romania has issued to Ukrainian citizens. Natalya Sirenko, the MFA's Romania desk officer, believed that the number is only in the high hundreds or low thousands, but we have heard speculation in the range of 60,000.

¶8. (C) A third issue is Ukrainian neuralgia about Romania's intentions toward Moldova. Any move toward Moldova's absorption by/reunification with Romania would go down badly in Kyiv, where it would be seen, inter alia, as whetting Bucharest's appetite for related territorial claims against Ukraine. Ukrainian presidential candidate Tihipko averred during his campaign that "the preservation of Moldova as an independent state is a strategic interest of Ukraine. No one is more interested in this than we are." (Note: It is no accident that Tihipko himself was born and raised in Moldova.) It is probably not too much of a stretch to suggest that Ukrainians perceive an analogy between Romania's attitude toward Moldova, and Russia's attitude toward Ukraine.

¶9. (C) It is also noteworthy that Ukraine, in its treatment of its national minorities, maintains a strict distinction between ethnic "Romanians" (who use the Latin alphabet and generally live in former Austro-Hungarian districts of Ukraine) and "Moldovans" (who use the Cyrillic alphabet and mostly live in the Ukrainian portions of the former Tsarist Russian province of Bessarabia). The MFA's Sirenko told us

that the GOU rejects Romanian efforts to conflate these "different" groups or to exercise any droit de regard over ethnic "Moldovans" in Ukraine, to the apparent consternation of Bucharest.

¶10. (C) In February 2009, the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) handed down a decision in a case brought by Bucharest about overlapping Romanian/Ukrainian claims to a section of the Black Sea continental shelf near Ukraine's Snake Island (ref A). While the decision was ostensibly a compromise, it awarded most of the disputed shelf to Romania, and has generated a backlash here against alleged Ukrainian diplomatic incompetence and Romanian pefidy. Many Ukrainians are convinced that the disputed shelf contains important deposits of hydrocarbons. The area indisputably contains important deposits of national pride, and even rational Ukrainian interlocutors have complained to us that a) the GOU bungled the case, and b) the Romanians have gloated too publicly over the decision.

¶11. (C) The other principal economic aggravations involve navigation, dredging, and pollution in the Danube Delta, where each side claims that its interests are harmed by the economic activity of the other. To illustrate how Romania will stop at nothing to damage Ukraine, one of our more tendentious interlocutors even alleged that Romanian activity in the lower Danube is designed to enhance erosion of Ukrainian territory and decrease the size of the country!

¶12. (C) Finally, there is a grab-bag of minor irritations. There are no direct flights between Ukraine and Romania. Ukrainians complain that ethnic Romanians in Ukraine have far more schools, broadcasting and publishing in their national language -- and more state financial support overall -- than the ethnic Ukrainian minority has in Romania. The two governments blame one another for the fact that they have not signed an agreement to facilitate local cross-border movement. The Romanians say they would need to open an additional consulate in Zakarpattya Oblast to handle the additional workload of processing related paperwork, and do not want to sign the agreement until they can implement it responsibly. The Ukrainians do not seek any additional consulates of their own in Romania and insist on strict reciprocity in the numbers of diplomatic missions in each country. They accuse Romania of holding up the agreement over the "unrelated" issue of new consulates. In addition, there are lingering hard feelings over the cancellation of President Basescu's planned visit to Ukraine in February 2009, and the tit-for-tat expulsion of diplomats the following month (ref A).

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WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS...

¶13. (C) Romanian diplomats here insist that it remains in their country's fundamental national interest to lobby for Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU. Unfortunately, the cumulative weight of bilateral problems has led many Ukrainians to dismiss Romania's efforts, and even its utility, as a mentor for Ukraine in Euro-Atlantic organizations. Ukrainian Deputy FM Yeliseyev did not shy away from using NATO v~aXin NATO on Ukraine's behalf (based on the reporting the MFA receives from the Ukrainian mission at NATO), but believes Romania has leveraged its EU membership not to help Ukraine, but to advance its own economic interests vis-a-vis Ukraine.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) One should not exaggerate the degree of Ukrainian concern about Romania. Former Deputy Minister of Defense Leonid Polyakov told us that there is no trust among Ukrainians toward Romania -- but no real fear either. Even

anti-Romanian gadfly Tihipko admitted that "this (Romanian activism contrary to Ukrainian interests) does not mean that the Romanians are enemies with whom we cannot cooperate." Nevertheless, Ukrainian-Romanian tensions constitute a piece of unfinished business in the process of reconciling Ukraine and her western neighbors, and serve as an actual or potential drag on Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

¶15. (C) A large part of the problem on the Ukrainian side is psychological. Ukrainians' short history of statehood and weak sense of national identity give them a greater sense of vulnerability in general -- even to a country half Ukraine's size. As one analyst wrote in the Ukrainian weekly "Dzerkalo tyzhnia," "The problem lies in the fact that Kyiv projects onto relations with Romania its fears about the potential Russian threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity in the Crimea. Ukraine's heightened sense of the security deficit in its relations with Russia ... makes it hypersensitive to other foreign-policy irritants as well." In the context of this wider insecurity, lesser problems take on deeper significance, and suspicion hardens into conspiracy theory. Rather than viewing the ICJ case as a normal, civilized way to resolve a territorial dispute, Ukrainians perceive it as an underhanded Romanian ploy, with many Ukrainians convinced that Bucharest somehow pulled a few strings in Brussels in order to ensure a favorable outcome in The Hague. One can understand Romania's denunciation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as a rejection of historic aggression against Romania, of secret treaties, or of great powers unilaterally deciding the fate of small nations. In Ukraine, unfortunately, there is a tendency to view it as an implicit rejection of the current Romanian-Ukrainian borders, which were essentially established by that Pact.

¶16. (C) There is no easy, quick-fix solution to the problem of Ukrainian distrust toward Romania. We can probably expect more unhelpful Ukrainian rhetoric like Yeliseyev's diatribe at NATO; at such times, basic damage-control will be the best we can manage. Nevertheless, some irritants might be ameliorated by time. Romania is not going to change its citizenship law or revoke the passports it has issued to Ukrainian citizens, but Ukrainian anxiety should recede as it becomes apparent that a) the number of such passports will be small; and b) Romania will not try to do in Bukovina what Russia has done in Abkhazia. Time should also soothe Ukrainian ire and disappointment over the ICJ decision and events like last year's canceled presidential visit and diplomatic expulsions. Finally, renewed high-level contacts between Romania and the new Ukrainian administration following Ukraine's February 7 presidential runoff election could present an opportunity to introduce a more positive dynamic into the relationship. Asked whether there is any hope of a Romanian/Ukrainian "reset," Romanian Ambassador Hristea (protect) told us that his embassy has been in touch with the teams of both runoff candidates, Yanukovych and Tymoshenko. Both camps had expressed some interest in improving bilateral relations, he said, but the real extent of that interest would only become clear once a new GOU is assembled. Notwithstanding his own "emotional preference" for the Ukrainian presidency, Hristea thought that a

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Yanukovych victory presented the best prospect for Romanian-Ukrainian rapprochement.
TEFFT